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SUBJECT: VISITING COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT URIBE OFFERS SECURITY POLICY  
PRESCRIPTIONS

#### SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (U) Colombian President Alvaro Uribe highlighted Colombia's progress on security, social welfare, and economic development during his one day visit to Guatemala, October 13. In doing so, he keyed on the importance of security as a fundamental pre-condition for attracting investment, making social progress, and promoting democratic institutions. Confronting a deteriorating security situation that has some parallels to Colombia's in the late 1990s, Guatemalans were keen to hear Uribe's policy prescriptions and lauded his achievements. End Summary.

#### URIBE HIGHLIGHTS GAINS; LINKS SECURITY, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

[1](#)2. (U) Colombian President Alvaro Uribe paid a one-day visit to Guatemala on October 13. In addition to a private meeting with President Colom, Uribe made two similar speeches, one to Congress and another to the Guatemalan Association of Managers (AGG). The Ambassador and Emboffs attended the latter event. Guatemalan President Colom made brief introductory remarks in which he addressed Guatemala's low tax rate (9.9% of GDP) and noted that the anemic rate of tax collection was insufficient to properly run the state. Uribe spoke for over an hour and described in detail how his government has made tremendous progress in ameliorating Colombia's problems over the last seven years.

[1](#)3. (U) Uribe highlighted significant security gains during his presidency. Over the last seven years the homicide rate, kidnapping rate and overall crime rate have all fallen substantially. Colombian security forces have also made significant gains against narco-traffickers and indigenous terrorist organizations such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Further, Uribe mocked the idea that security is an ideological value of the political left or right; instead, he offered, "security is a democratic value."

#### MORE INVESTMENT AND MORE GRADUATES

[1](#)4. (U) Uribe noted how increased security encouraged greater rates of investment and social progress. Investment flows, stimulated by better security and improved market access, in turn were major drivers of economic growth. Uribe also observed that Colombia's gains were enabled by comprehensive reform of state institutions including those to the tax authority and national pension system. Likewise, security gains are intrinsically linked to social progress, he said. Colombian security forces have strengthened relationships with communities, gaining the public's confidence and increasing public collaboration with the security forces against armed groups. Likewise, the more secure social environment, alongside government education initiatives, has allowed for gains in education as more students finish high school and university.

[1](#)5. (U) Event attendees were highly responsive to the style and

substance of President Uribe's speech. Applause was frequent during the address and the crowd offered a standing ovation at the end. The large business audience was especially responsive to Uribe's discussion of tax reform and the use of deferred taxes to spur investment.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Like Colombia in the late 1990s, Guatemala currently faces an extremely challenging security situation, driven in large part by narco-trafficking and its related crimes, as well as a crisis in the state's rule of law institutions. As a result, Uribe's policy prescriptions struck a chord with his Guatemalan audience. It also helps explain broad support here for the international community's efforts to support law enforcement and judicial institutions. The positive response from the business class to Uribe's tax reform points was noteworthy as the private sector has historically been vehemently opposed to real tax reform. End Comment.  
ROBINSON